

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-11 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NEAE-00 DHA-02 ORM-02 AID-05 SAM-01

SAB-01 TRSE-00 SSM-03 /088 W
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O R 071422Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8014

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK

COMMSIXTHFLT

CTF SIX ZERO

CTF SIX ONE

CTF SIX TWO

CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO

FOSIF ROTA SPAIN

FICEURLANT NORFOLK VA

DIA WASHDC

CIA WAHHDC

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 0178

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, PINT, LE

SUBJECT: TEL ZAATAR SIEGE DOMINATES SECURITY PICTURE

REF: BEIRUT 0123 (1455Z)

1. SUMMARY: RIGHTIST SEIGE OF TEL ZAATAR REFUGEE CAMP CONTINUES, AND SUSPENSION OF ACTIVITIES OF HIGHER COORDINATION COMMITTEE MAKES SOLUTION HARDER TO REACH. SPECTRE OF "ECONOMIC WARFARE" RAISED AS PALESTINIANS THREATEN TO CUT SUPPLIES FOR ASHRAFIYEH QUARTER. CABINET MEETING SCHEDULED FOR TODAY ON TEL ZAATAR PROBLEM AND POLITICAL ISSUES CANCELLED, REPORTEDLY FOR SECURITY REASONS. END SUMMARY.

2. SEIGE OF TEL ZAATAR CAMP AND CLASHES IN ADJOINING DISTRICTS ARE FOCUS OF ATTENTION TODAY, JAN 7. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, PHALANGISTS AND PALESTINIANS HAD REACHED AGREEMENT ON ENDING BLOCKADE AT 0030 TODAY. HOWEVER, IT NEVER WENT INTO EFFECT AS HEAVY FIGHTING CONTINUED THROUGHOUT NIGHT IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST SUBURBS AND COMMERCIAL CENTER, NOTABLY TEL ZAATAR-KEDWANAY/FURN EL CHEBBACK, AHRAFIYEH-NABAA, AND HAZMIEH.

3. IN NEW TWIST, FIRING WAS ALSO REPORTED BETWEEN NABAA AND JDAIDE WHICH MAY INDICATE A SHIFT IN LINES. IF SO, THIS WOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH ALLEGATIONS BY BOTH SIDES THAT AN ENCIRCLING MOVEMENT IS UNDER WAY TO THE EAST OF BEIRUT. PHALANGE SPOKESMAN AMINE GEMAYEL CONTENDS THAT FEDAYEEN INTEND TO CUT BEIRUT IN TWO AND ISOLATE THE CHRISTIAN AREAS. TO THIS END, PHALANGISTS CHARGE THAT PALESTINIANS HAVE EXPELLED CHRISTIAN FAMILIES FROM JISR EL PACHA-TEL ZAATAR ZONE. THIS ECHOS SIMILAR CHARGES MADE LAST MAY THAT CHRISTIAN FAMILIES IN DEKWANEH-TEL ZAATAR HAD BEEN DRIVEN FROM THEIR HOMES IN WHAT PROVED TO BE SHORT LIVED CAUSE CELEBRE.

4. PREDICTABLY, LEFTISTS AND PALESTINIANS ASSERT THAT SEIGE
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OF TEL ZAATAR IS PART OF PHALANGIST PLAN TO DRAG FEDAYEEN INTO CONFLICT AND FORCE RELOCATION OF CAMPS. WHATEVER THE CASE, NO FOOD TRUCKS HAVE ENTERED TEL ZAATAR SINCE BLOCKADE BEGAN AND BOTH SIDES APPEAR TO HAVE DUG IN.

5. FIGHTING WAS CONTINUING AS OF 1500 AND BEIRUT RADIO REPORTED SITUATION VERY TENSE WITH HEAVY FIRING. ALL BEIRUT STREETS ARE CONSIDERED DANGEROUS. AREA NEAR EMBASSY IS

CALM AND SO FAR THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF
NEIGHBORHOOD MILIA BECOMING ACTIVE. TRIPOLI AND ZAHLE
ARE QUIET.

6. COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY IN CAPITAL REMAINS GENERALLY
LIGHT. SECURITY CONDITIONS PROHIBIT DISTRIBUTION OF GASO-
LINE AND HEATING FUEL TODAY. MOST LIKELY FRIDAY ARRIVAL
OF TANKER SHIP FROM TRIPOLI TO DORA WILL BE POSTPONED
UNTIL SECURITY CONDITIONS IMPORVE. IN RESPONSE TO
PHALANGIST SEIGE OF TEL ZAATAR, PALESTINIANS HAVE THREA-
TENED TO CUT SUPPLY FO FRESH FRUITS, VEGETABLES, AND MEETS
TO CHRISTIAN ASHRAFIYEH. (COMMENT: EVEN IF THREAT IS
CARRED OUT, ASHRAFIYEH CAN LIKELY BE SUPPLIED AT LEAST AT
SUBSISTENCE LEVEL FROM MOUNT LEBANON. THREAT ALSO
RAISES PROSPECT OF "ECONOMIC WARFARE," FOR THE PHALAN-
GISTS COULD PREVENT DELIVERY OF POL FROM DORA AND GRAIN
AND OTHER SUPPLIES FROM PORT AREA TO MOSLEM PROTIONS OF
BEIRUT. HOWEVER, SUCH GROSS DISRUPTION OF THE DISTRIBU-
TION SYSTEM COULD PRODUCE GREAT HARDSHIP THROUGHTOUT THE
CITY. MUTUAL BENEFIT OF COMMERCIAL EXCHANGE WOULD SUG-
GEST COMMON-SENSE LIMIT TO DISRUPTION OF COOPERATION
NECESSARY TO SUSTAIN BASIC LIFE PATTERNS.)

7. COMPLICATING THE SECURITY PICTURE IS FACT THAT HIGHER
COORDINATION COMMITTEE, THE SOLE ORGANISM WHICH ATTEMPTS
TO MONITOR CEASEFIRE BY JOINING REPRESENTATIVES OF WARRING
PARTIES, DECIDED YESTERDAY TO SUSPEND ITS ACTIVITIES INDE-
FINITELY BECAUSEOF DISAGREEMENTS AMONG ITS MEMBERS.
PREMIER KARAME IS TRYING TO KEEP THIS LAST "SAFETY VALVE"
FUNCTIONING BY ORDERING ITS MEMBERS TO MEET UNDER HIS
CHARIMANSHIP SOMETIME TODAY. HE HAS NOT YET SET A
SPECIFIC TIME FOR THIS MEETING. QUESTION REMAINS WHETHER
ALL PARTIES WILL RESPOND TO HIS CALL. PALESTINIANS AND
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MOSLEM/LEFTIST GROUPS HAVE DECLARED THEY WILL NOT RESUME
MEMBERSHIP IN COMMITTEE UNTIL TEL ZAATAR SIEGE IS LIFTED.

8. CABINET WAS DUE TO MEET JAN 7, BUT SESSION CANCELLED
AT LAST MINUTE DUE TO INSECURITY. CABINET HAD BEEN SCHE-
DULED TO CONSIDER PRINCIPALLY THE SITUATION IN WAKE OF TEL
ZAATAR AFFAIR. OTHER HOT ISSUES ON CABINET AGENDA WERE
EXTENSION OF PARLIAMENTARY TERM AND PROPOSALS FOR
"COMMON DENOMINATOR" SOLUTION TO POLITICAL CRISIS.
PREIMIER KARAME'S SUPPORT FOR EXTENSION PLAN HAS GIVEN
IT IMPORTANT BOOST. HE REPORTEDLY TODL LEBANESE FRIEND
RECENTLY THAT HE BELIEVES PROLONGATION OF MANDATE TO
AVOID CONSTITUTIONAL VACUUM IS ONLY ALTERNATIVE TO MILI-
TARY COUP. AS FOR "COMMON DENOMINATOR" ISSUE,
RE-EMERGENCE OF HARD MARONITE STANCE HAS HALTED PRO-

GRESS IN THIS AREA, ESPECIALLY REJECTION OF 50-50 SPLIT IN
PARLIAMENT. A COMPROMISE IDEA CURRENTLY CIRCULATING
IS 11-10 SPLIT IN FAVOR OF CHRISTIANS.
GODLEY

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